

House Bill No. 579
Comments

The Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce fully understands the need for a unified voice for our community with regard to military missions. We were told specifically during the last round of Base Realignment and Closure or BRAC, that it was very difficult for decision makers to determine exactly what we wanted because there were several different messages from our community.

It is also important that you know that the military assets in Cascade County and Great Falls accounts for approximately 46 percent as identified by the University of Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research. Because of this significant equation in our local economy, you can see we certainly have a vested interest in what happens to military assets in our area.

That is why we created the Montana Defense Alliance. It was also critical we included key stakeholders in the design of the Montana Defense Alliance. To achieve that goal we included Cascade County, City of Great Falls, the Great Falls Airport Authority, the Great Falls Development Authority and the Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce appointed representatives as permanent members of the Montana Defense Alliance along with six business leaders from the community who are elected from the at large membership.

The Montana Defense Alliance is funded by dues paying members and managed by the Montana Defense Alliance Executive Committee.

The MTDA also fully support the Military Affairs Committee of the Chamber who's primary purpose is to foster community/military relations at the local level. However, those relations continue as senior military leadership moves to more senior positions within command and all the way to the Pentagon.

The Montana Defense Alliance firmly believes that state involvement in protecting current military missions while seeking emerging missions is critically important. As we have previously testified, there are numerous states around the country that state engagement has been a vital component in their success. However, we do not believe the state needs another advocacy group when there is already an effective group in place that has proven to be successful, has exceptional relationships established at every level of military command from the local level to the Pentagon and close coordination and working relations with political leadership from the local, state and federal levels.

Key Points

1. Montana already has a committed, active, effective advocacy group in place appointed by key stakeholders in Great Falls and Cascade County (the primary location of Montana's military assets).
 2. Montana will lose if it has two different groups potentially advocating different messages.
 3. The Montana Defense Alliance (MTDA) is better positioned than a larger state sponsored group to advocate.
 4. The Montana Defense Alliance has engaged the Governor's Office to make sure it is involved, aware, and speaking with one voice for the state.
 5. Whether HB-579 passes or not, the MTDA will continue its mission of support and advocacy for Montana's military missions.
-

Detailed Points

- Under HB-579, Task Force meetings would be public meetings subject to public meetings laws. Successfully advocating for military missions requires careful planning, development of strategic advantages and the ability to work behind the scenes to influence decisions. A State government Task Force by its nature is unable to function in this capacity. All of the group's strategic planning would be exposed for the taking by other communities around the nation competing for missions. This will endanger the state's ability to effectively identify and pursue new missions. HB-579 delegates a strategic work plan and lobbying effort to a government panel. This work would be more effectively accomplished by a private organization like MTDA.
- HB-579 calls for the Adjutant General to be a voting member of the Task Force. Because the work of the Task Force is primarily to lobby congress for military missions and support future mission development, there may be few subjects where the Adjutant General could take a position. It is likely, because of his or her position, that the Adjutant General could not even advise the Task Force on most matters.
- A number of the HB-579 Task Force members hold elected office. The military has protocol for meeting with elected officials. For instance, they typically will not accept meetings during election cycles that will restrict when meetings can occur. In addition, the political nature of Task Force members that are elected, in addition to those appointed by elected officials, is likely to make it more difficult to work with the full Congressional Delegation and the Governor. MTDA is not politically affiliated and has a demonstrated ability to work across party lines and collaborate with both military and political leadership in advocating for Montana's military.

- Consistency is vital in representing Montana's military. In the past four years of working diligently on Montana's military issues, MTDA has built exceptional relationships within the leadership of the Armed Forces and MTDA leadership is now on a first name basis with many of the key decision makers that shape our installations' futures. To illustrate MTDA's effectiveness, MTDA was invited by the Air Force to be a member of Air Force Global Strike Command Commander's Group. In addition, MTDA recently became a charter member in a new nuclear lobbying coalition made up of all the states involved in the nuclear enterprise. By contrast, the Task Force, chartered by HB-579, will have little consistency. Political appointees and even the Adjutant General are likely to turn over with elections and reassignments. MTDA has demonstrated consistent leadership for four years. New board members of the MTDA are introduced into the key military relationships so there is consistency over time.
- HB-579 calls for State funding to be used by elected office holders, active military members, and political appointees to "lobby Congress". This is an improper use of State funds under Montana law and may also violate the oath of office and rules of conduct for numerous Task Force members. Elected Task Force members may have to travel on "their own time" to many of these meetings. By contrast, MTDA's funds come from dues paying members and are not restricted by these same laws and regulations.
- Montana, like most states, is struggling with budgetary constraints. Allocating \$250,000 in state funds to an economic development study and \$163,000 per year for travel expenses further frustrates the State's budget issues. Even if this level of funding can be sustained now, can we be certain that it will be consistently available. Launching a new lobbying effort and not being able to consistently maintain the level of funding in the future would create inconstancy and would damage the key relationships that have been established within military leadership. MTDA conducts its work with no taxpayer dollars; it is member funded.
- It appears the \$250,000 for an economic development study would be redundant and a duplication of work. The following has already been accomplished through local resources.
 - a. The SAIC study (Mission Assessment study) done in 2004 for the City of Great Falls, funded by B.A.S.E. funds and CDBG/HB 713 via Cascade County.
 - b. HB & A Runway study (Clear and Accident Potential Zones Land Use Compatibility Study) done in 2007 by the Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce. Funded by CDBG/HB 713 via Cascade County and B.A.S.E. funds.
 - c. Ferraro land Appraisal report (appraisal of land values within the APZ's and clear zones) done in 2007 by Cascade County. Funded by CDBG/HB713 via Cascade County and B.A.S.E. funds.
 - d. BBP&A Mission Assessment Update was done in 2010. The Chamber of Commerce was the controlling entity. Funded by CDBG/HB713 via Cascade County and B.A.S.E. funds.
 - e. Malmstrom AFB Joint Land Use study done by Cascade County in 2011 funded by Cascade County and the Office of Economic Assistance.

- f. Malmstrom RED Yellow Green Implementation project currently being done by Cascade County. Funded via Cascade County and the Office of Economic Assistance.
 - g. Great Falls Airport Authority is currently initiating a noise study that will analyze the impact of basing F-35 aircraft at Great Falls International Airport. This study will be helpful in pursuing a future F-35 mission.
- The City of Great Falls and Cascade County as well as the Great Falls Chamber, Great Falls Development Authority and Great Falls Airport Authority are the key stakeholders in MTDA. Several of the states largest military installations reside within the City and County and the Montana Air National Guard (MTANG) resides entirely on free land provided by the Airport Authority. HB-579 does not provide any mechanism for involvement by these key stakeholders. This is a fundamental flaw in its organization. Perhaps the most significant issue of growing importance in retaining military missions is the privatization of base services and infrastructure. Around the country, bases are transferring ownership of utilities to local jurisdictions. They are asking local government to take over roadway maintenance, power generation, and local land use planning. The specific local governments that are engaged with the bases must be key stakeholders in any group advocating for the protection and growth of Montana's military missions. In fact, these local governments may be the key to retaining our missions by identifying cost effective solutions for our local bases. An example of this is the Montana Air National Guard's use of the airfield at the Great Falls Airport. The Airport maintains the airfield and MTANG utilizes it at no cost. The City of Great Falls has already begun exploring options with the Air Force.
- Through its work in the last four years, MTDA has learned the importance of presenting a unified voice and message for the support of Montana's missions. The Pentagon and our Congressional Delegation have both stressed the importance of the stakeholders all pulling in the same direction in support of specific missions and goals for Montana's military installations. HB-579 will create a separate voice from many of the local stakeholder agencies and this could convolute the message to the Pentagon and Congressional Delegation, which would make us less effective in lobbying for missions. I can assure you the Federal Delegation and the Montana Governor are working together to have a unified voice for Montana. They understand the importance of a unified voice at their level and they deserve no less from those they represent.
- Many of the HB-579 Task Force appointees would be elected officials or would be representing elected officials in some capacity. This construction provides great opportunity for those opposing military missions to insert themselves in the process, attach themselves to the public record and dilute effectiveness of the Task Force message. This could be very damaging to a unified voice for military support by magnifying any controversy and providing a convenient means of amplifying any public discord over military matters directly to Pentagon leadership.
- HB-579 has no financial note attached. In addition to the funds that are to be used for travel expenses, the Task Force would obviously need staff resources. The full financial impact of the bill should be estimated and discussed.

In conclusion:

- The Task Force is likely to send mixed messages to key decision makers which could compromise current and emerging missions
- What the Task Force intends to accomplish is redundant to the efforts of the MTDA
- The unintended consequences of any legislation such as this could be extremely damaging to the overall efforts that are currently ongoing. This in turn could have a direct and negative impact on current and emerging missions which would be harmful not only to specific areas impacted but to Montana overall.